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Album of Patna Qalam Paintings

at Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library

Introduction by
Imtiaz Ahmad

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Introduction

The Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, founded in 1891 by Khan Bahadur Khuda Bakhsh (1842-1908), is a heritage centre rightly known all over the world for its unique collection of about 21,000 manuscripts, mainly in Arabic and Persian, of which several hundred are rare manuscripts, some being the only extant copy in the world. The Library also has about 2.6 lakh printed books, including some rare ones, in different languages. The collection also includes coins, scientific instruments and antiques, besides over 2000 paintings, largely miniatures, of different Indian and Islamic Schools: Mughal, Rajput, Awadh, Pahari, Iranian and Turkish, to name a few. In addition, there are also over a dozen paintings of the *Patna Qalam*, which are being introduced in this Album. Most of these paintings are on mica sheets – a unique feature of the *Patna Qalam* – and are separately framed; one is on paper and is included in a pictorial album. All these paintings were the personal collection of Mrs. Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh, the wife of the eldest son of the founder of the Library who was an eminent Orientalist.

The *Patna Qalam* represents the local style of painting that developed at Patna (Azimabad) in the 18th century. It represents a combination of influences of the imperial Mughal school, the local school that developed at Murshidabad under its Nawabs and the style patronized by the English officers of the East India Company. Its specimens are scattered in museums and collections both in Patna and outside, including some abroad. The collections at Patna include those at the Khuda Bakhsh Library, Patna Museum, Patna College of Arts and Crafts, Jalan House and the Chaitanya Pustakalaya.

The 18th century was a formative phase in the history of Patna. In its early years, the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb, appointed his grandson Prince Azim the Governor of Bihar. The latter renamed the capital city, Patna, as *Azimabad*, a name which is still occasionally used for the city. He intended to make this city 'a second Delhi' and undertook its renovation and beautification on a large scale. There is no doubt that he also patronized painters. His brief tenure was cut short by the war of succession that followed the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. At the same time, the city of Murshidabad under the Nawabs also emerged as an important centre of painting and some of the painters from that city came and settled at Patna in the succeeding years. About half a century later, Bengal including Patna came under the control of the English East India Company. One of the officers of the Company, William Fullarton, took keen interest in encouraging the local painters. By 1764, the early examples of a distinct style can be traced. Some of these paintings are preserved at the India Office Library.

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These painters settled in the old part of the city and established their ateliers. Most of them belonged to the *kayastha* caste. Some important names include those of Sewak Ram, Hulas Lal, Jairam Das, Shivdayal Lal, Ishwari Prasad and others. The names of at least 2 lady-painters also figure prominently in this list. They are Daksho Bibi and Sona Bibi. The *Patna Qalam* survived for almost a century and a half, from the mid-18th to early 20th. The introduction of photography and printing of pictures adversely affected the painters of the *Patna Qalam* and gradually the art became extinct. At present, there are no living practitioners of this art.

The *Patna Qalam* was essentially a popular art since the paintings focus mainly on the life and interests of the common people. The major themes include: the routine chores and occupations, individuals, landscape and buildings, religious themes, fairs and festivals, flowers, birds and animals, etc. These paintings were made on three different mediums – paper, mica-pieces and ivory.

The salient features of the *Patna Qalam* may be broadly summarized as follows:

i. it was a popular art-form that flourished without direct court-patronage;

ii. it focused on the life of the common people;

iii. it was not ornamental but realistic; decorated margins were conspicuously absent;

iv. the focus was mainly on the figure portrayed and the background was not highlighted;

v. these paintings were individual works of art and not collective compositions, as was the case with the paintings of the Mughal school;

The paintings of the Khuda Bakhsh Library Collection, included in this album, are those of common people: a weaver, a water-carrier, a fruit-seller, a drummer, an ascetic, etc. None of the paintings in the collection bear the name of the painter. However, the painting of the ascetic carries a note that it was the work of Madho Lal.

This album is being published in connection with the Library's programme to celebrate the 99th Foundation Day of the state of Bihar. As is widely known, it was in 1911, on the occasion of the *Delhi Durbar* that George V, the King Emperor, made a declaration to the effect that Bihar (and Orissa) shall constitute a separate province and would cease to be a part of the province of Bengal. The formal Notification was made on 22nd of March, 1912 and the decision came into actual effect from 1st of April, 1912. The 22nd of March is being observed as *Bihar Diwas* by the Government of Bihar. This album intends to focus attention on the rich cultural heritage of Bihar and also on the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library as a major centre of this great cultural heritage.

Imtiaz Ahmad
Director

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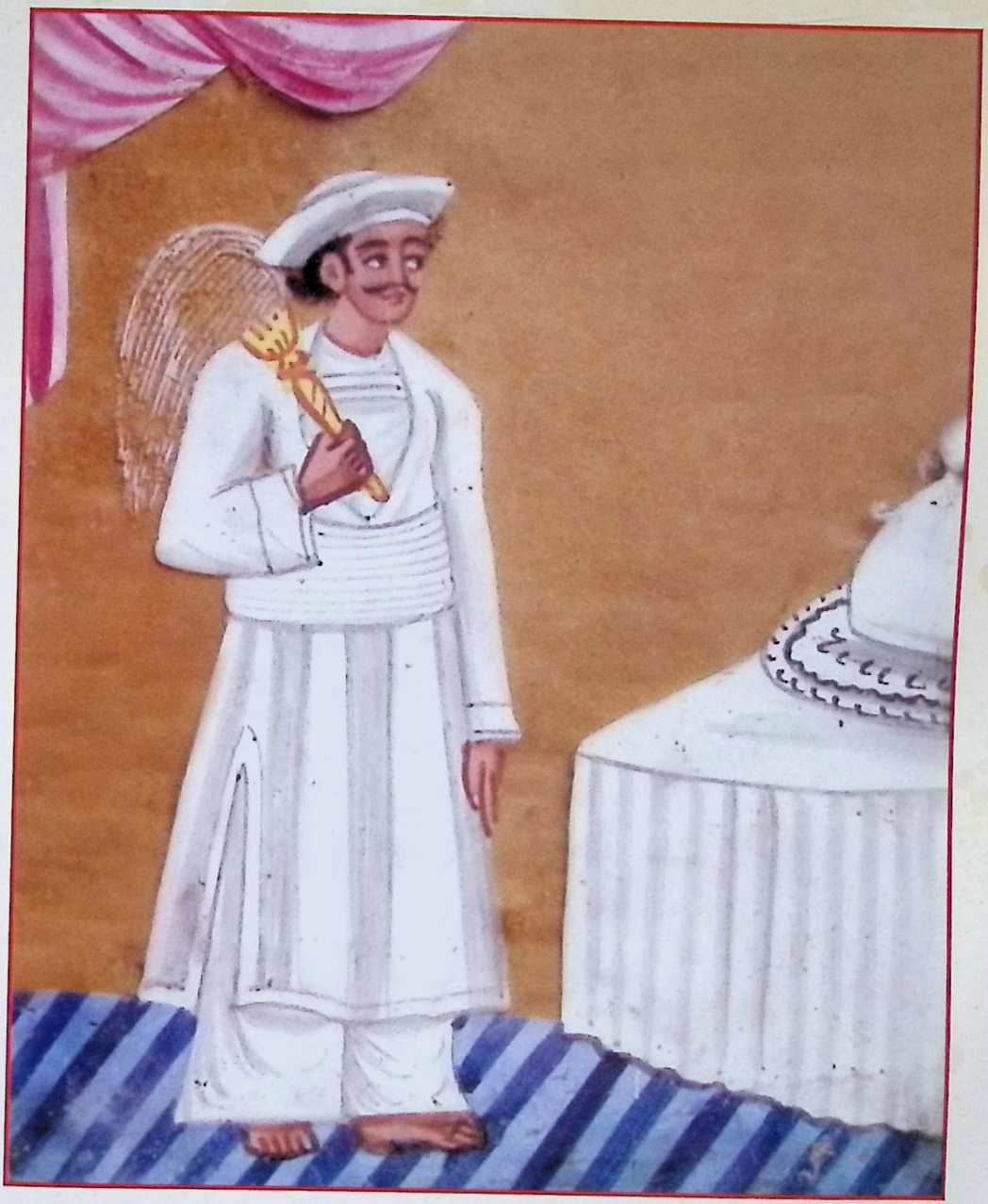

Attendant with fly-whisk

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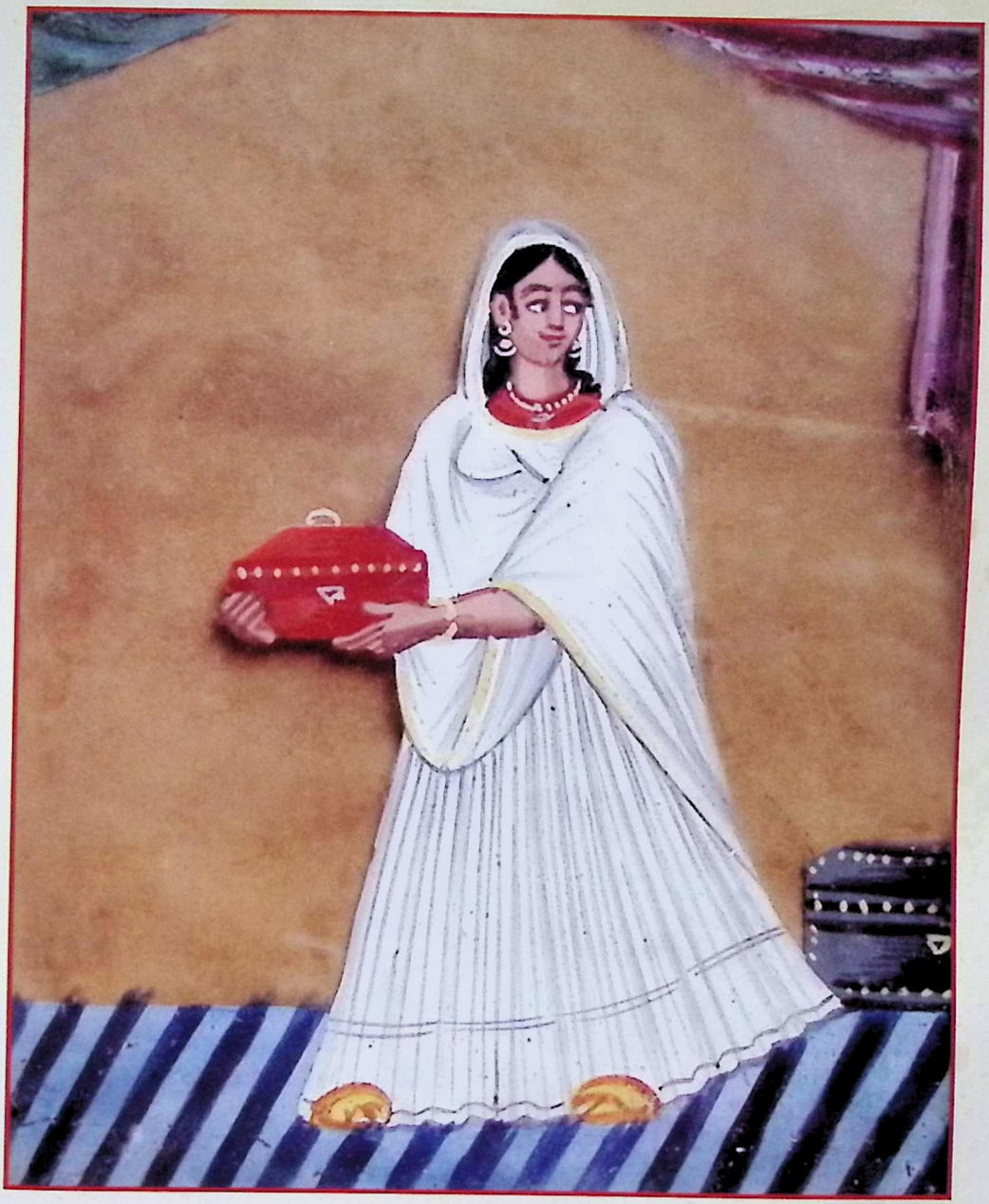

Lady with jewellery box

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A Scribe

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A Drum-beater

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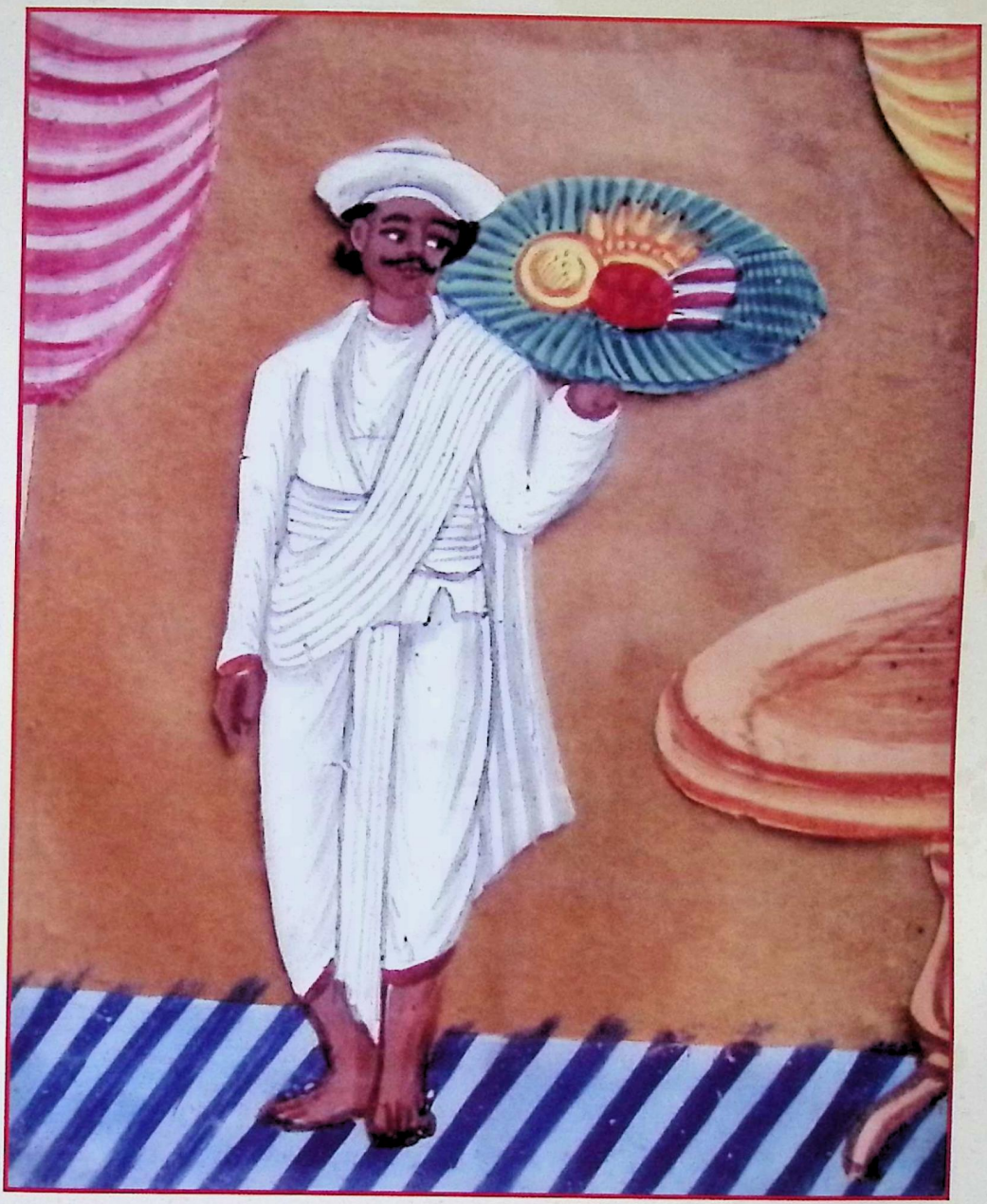

A fruit seller

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Domestic help

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Water carrier

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Gardener

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Office staff

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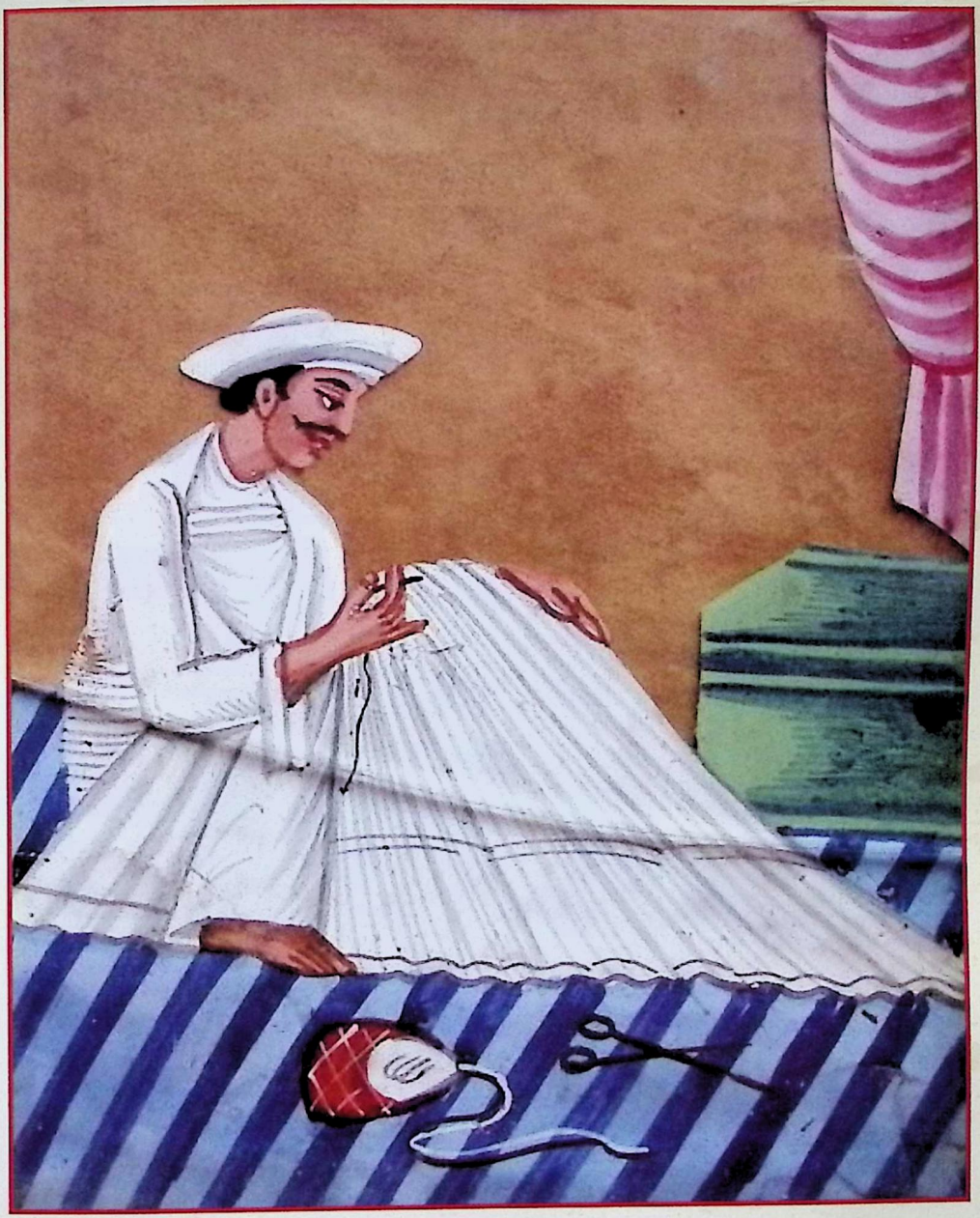

Weaver

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Torch-bearer

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Huqqa (Water pipe) bearer

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Shoe maker polishing a boot

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An ascetic

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About the Library

Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library is a unique repository of the past heritage, preserved in the form of manuscripts written on paper, palm-leaf, deer-skin, cloth and sundry materials. At the same time it has a modern face, housing over 2.5 lakh books in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, English and Hindi, besides a few in German, French, Punjabi, Japanese and Russian as well. It is one of the most vibrant cultural and academic centres of the town, organising seminars, workshops, lectures, academic and cultural programmes in a regular manner.

The Library was established on 5th October, 1891 by Khan Bahadur Khuda Bakhsh (1842-1908) a Government Pleader and ardent bibliophile. At the time of its establishment the Library had 4,000 manuscripts. The number has increased to about 21,000 at present. It also has a collection of more than 3,000 paintings of different Indian and Islamic schools: Mughal, Rajput, Iranian, Turkish, Awadh, Pahari and Patna Qalam.

The Library combines the twin roles of centre for research in Oriental Studies and a Public Library. It is also heading towards becoming a Digital Manuscripts Library. About 1,000 manuscripts have already been digitised and can be accessed by the readers in the e-reading Room of the Library.

The Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library Collection is also available on its website for the benefit of scholars and researchers.

The Library also publishes a Research Journal and books in different languages. It provides fellowships at various levels and has currently been selected by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India for award of the prestigious *Tagore National Fellowship*.

Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library
Ashok Rajpath, Patna-800004
Website: http://kblibrary.nic.in